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ABSTRACT

In a number of respects, principals of rural schools encounter problems different from their counterparts in urban schools, e.g., fewer supportive services are available to assist principals in administering programs for disadvantaged pupils, rural patrons often resist curriculum innovations and new teaching techniques, and any guidance services available are usually those provided by the principal. Principals trying to placate generally conservative school boards frequently resist the ideal of allowing teachers academic freedom and professional interaction among principals to foster growth and development is difficult because rural schools are geographically isolated. As a preliminary step to providing in-service activities and programs for elementary school principals in rural school districts in western Oklahoma, the needs of principals are identified and divided into categories of curriculum, instruction, communication, faculty and staff mangement, and student management; a Needs Assessment of Elementary Principals (NAEP) questionnaire is developed and administered to 269 principals in 177 school districts of 28 counties. Results from 133 usable rank order responses indicate that full-time and half-time principals perceive their greatest need to be instruction related and principals who also teach full-time rank faculty and staff management as their greatest need from in-service programs. (NEC)

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INSTRUCTION RANKED HIGHEST BY MOST RURAL ELEMENTARY PRINCIPALS

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Background

There exists in the literature no paucity of information regarding the role of the elementary school principal either traditionally or contemporarily. Representative of this writing is Stone who stated that the role of the principal has changed primarily from a facilitator of curriculum development to that of an administrator of negotiated agreements.[1] However, the degree of change may depend on geographical location. Commanalities of all elementary principalships, regardless of the size of school, the geographical location, etc., exist. The major goal is to facilitate learning. Within the school structure the only person who faces both inward toward the school and outward toward the total school system and the public is the principal.[2]

Recognizing that commonalities exist is not a sufficient premise to derive a conclusion that rural school principals have the same roles and needs that urban principals have. "Rural education is worthy of significantly more attention and assistance than researchers, policymakers, and educators have accorded it in the recent past,"[3] is an emerging consensus.

Rural schools have many problems unlike those of urban schools and, thus rural elementary school principals encounter problems different from their counterparts in urban schools. Principals of rural schools assist teachers to administer programs designed to meet the needs of disadvantaged pupils with fewer supportive services than those in the larger cities. Secondly, rural patrons often resist efforts to initiate curriculum innovations and new teaching techniques. Thirdly, guidance services provided are those provided by the principal. And fourthly, rural school principals

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trying to placate a generally conservative school board, resist the ideal of allowing teachers academic freedom.[4]

Because rural schools generally are isolated from each other geographically, a suggestion by Mayberry emphasizes another problem. Continuous growth, an important characteristic of a teacher, can result from professional interaction among teachers.[5] A logical conclusion could be reached for elementary school principals. Large urban school districts which employ several principals could provide for professional interaction among principals. This would be virtually impossible in small rural districts which employ one or very few principals.

Concurring with the need for professional growth and development are St. John and Runkel, "The need for professional development for today's administrators is clearly greater than ever before because of technological advances, the knowledge explosion, and social conflicts influencing our educational endeavors."[6] Methods to accomplish the professional growth include in-service programs planned and conducted by their own school districts and other resources.[7] Rural school districts would be severely hampered if they tried to provide in-service programs for administrators within their district.

As a preliminary step to providing in-service activities and programs for the elementary school principals in rural school districts in western Oklahoma, an assessment of the needs of these principals was conducted. From the literature and from students enrolled in graduate classes in elementary school administration, various needs of elementary school principals were identified.

Methodology

Following identification these needs were divided into the categories of curriculum, instruction, communication, faculty and staff management, and student management.

In preliminary draft form the Needs Assessment of Elementary Principals was

administered to a graduate class in elementary school administration. Revisions were made and, in final form, the NAEP was sent to all of the elementary school principals in 28 countries in western Oklahoma which included 269 principals employed in 177 school districts.

The principals were requested to rank order all of the needs in each category and then rank order the 5 categories from greatest to least importance.

Data Collected, Analyzed and Interpreted

One hundred thirty-three, or 49 percent, of the total principals returned usable responses. Included were 86 full-time principals, 36 principals who had their time divided evenly between teaching responsibilities and administrative responsibilities, and 11 principals who were full-time teachers.

Each of the respondents was asked to check the category representing the enrollment of the school in which he/she was the principal. Thirteen, 61, 41 and 18 checked the categories of 1-100, 101-250, 251-400 and more than 400 students, respectively.

Reflecting the basically small, rural school district was the number of respondents who were the only elementary principal in the district. Seventy-eight of the respondents were employed in school districts with only one elementary principal. Another 29 were employed in districts with 6 or fewer elementary principals. The remaining 26 were employed in districts employing more than 6 elementary principals.

For purposes of analysis and interpretation, the responses were divided into three groups. Groups A, B, and C were full-time principals, half-time principals, and full-time teaching principals, respectively. This organization and analysis of data provided a description of the perceptions of the principals.

As shown in Table 1, full-time principals ranked their needs from greatest to least in the following order: instruction, curriculum, communication, faculty and staff management, and student management. Helping teachers with classroom management, helping teachers to plan for instruction, and selecting instruments to evaluate

instruction were ranked first, second, and third respectively in the instruction category.

Table 1

Rank Order of Categories According to Administrative Responsibility

Category	Administrative Responsibility			
	A*	B	C	Total
Curriculum	2	3	3	2
Instruction	1	1	2	1
Communication	3	2	4	3
Faculty and Staff Management	4	4	1	4
Student Management	5	5	5	5

*A Full-time principal N=86

B Half-time principal N=36

C Full-time teaching principal N=11

Instruction, communication, curriculum, faculty and staff management, and student management were ranked from greatest to least by half-time principals. Full-time teaching principals ranked their needs from greatest to least in the following order: faculty and staff management, instruction, curriculum, communication and student management.

Correlations were computed between the various groups of principals to determine the degree of similarity in the rank-ordering of the categories. High positive correlations were obtained between full-time principals and half-time principals, as shown in Table 2. Somewhat lower positive-correlations were obtained between half-time principals and full-time teaching principals and between full-time principals and full-time teaching principals.

Table 2

Correlations of Categorical Rank-Ordering According to Administrative Responsibility

Category	Administrative Responsibility		
	AB*	BC	AC
Curriculum	.95	.95	.90
Instruction	.94	.60	.66
Communication	1.00	.50	.50
Faculty and Staff Management	.90	1.00	.92
Student Management	.90	.80	.90
Total	.90	.30	.40

*AB Full-time principal and half-time principal

BC Half-time principal and full-time teaching principal

AC Full-time principal and full-time teaching principal

Summary

Full-time principals and half-time principals perceive their needs to be similar. Full-time teaching principals perceive needs differently possibly because they have very little, if any time, to fulfill their administrative responsibilities. Full-time principals and half-time principals are allotted time to assume administrative responsibilities. They indicated their greatest area of need to be instruction or instruction related.

Harris stated that evaluating instruction is not only one of the most unique and perhaps most important tasks of supervision, but also it is the most widely neglected of all tasks.[8]

If in-service activities are to be provided based on the results of this survey, the activities should be designed to meet the needs expressed.

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